SVIPDAGSMOL

The Ballad of Svipdag

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The two poems, *Grougaldr* (*Groa's Spell*) and *Fjolsvinnsmol* (the *Ballad of Fjolsvith*), which many editors have, very wisely, united under the single title of Svipdagsmol, are found only in paper manuscripts, none of them antedating the seventeenth century. Everything points to a relatively late origin for the poems: their extensive use of "kennings" or poetical circumlocutions, their romantic spirit, quite foreign to the character of the unquestionably older poems, the absence of any reference to them in the earlier documents, the frequent errors in mythology, and, finally, the fact that the poems appear to have been preserved in unusually good condition. Whether or not a connecting link of narrative verse joining the two parts has been lost is an open question; on the whole it seems likely that the story was sufficiently well known so that the reciter of the poem (or poems) merely filled in the gap with a brief prose summary in pretty much his own words. The general relationship between dialogue and narrative in the Eddic poems is discussed in the introductory note to the *Grimnismol*, in connection with the use of prose links.

The love story of Svipdag and Mengloth is not referred to elsewhere in the *Poetic Edda*, nor does Snorri mention it; however, Groa, who here appears as Svipdag's mother, is spoken of by Snorri as a wise woman, the wife of Orvandil, who helps Thor with her magic charms. On the other hand, the essence of the story, the hero's winning of a bride ringed about by flames, is strongly suggestive of parts of the Sigurth-Brynhild traditions. Whether or not it is to be regarded as a nature or solar myth depends entirely on one's view of the whole "solar myth" school of criticism, not so highly esteemed today as formerly; such an interpretation is certainly not necessary to explain what is, under any circumstances, a very charming romance told, in the main, with dramatic effectiveness.

In later years the story of Svipdag and Mengloth became popular throughout the North, and was made the subject of many Danish and Swedish as well as Norwegian ballads. These have greatly assisted in the reconstruction of the outlines of the narrative surrounding the dialogue poems here given.

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I. GROUGALDR

GROA'S SPELL

Svipdag spake:
1. "Wake thee, Groa! | wake, mother good!

At the doors of the dead I call thee;
Thy son, bethink thee, | thou badst to seek
Thy help at the hill of death."

Groa spake:
2. "What evil vexes | mine only son,
What baleful fate hast thou found,
That thou callest thy mother, | who lies in the mould,
And the world of the living has left?"

Svipdag spake:
3. "The woman false | whom my father embraced
Has brought me a baleful game;
For she bade me go forth | where none may fare,
And Mengloth the maid to seek."

Groa spake:
4. "Long is the way, | long must thou wander,
But long is love as well;
Thou mayst find, perchance, | what thou fain wouldst have,
If the fates their favor will give."

[1. *Svipdag* ("Swift Day"): the names of the speakers are lacking in the manuscripts.

3. *The woman*: Svipdag's stepmother, who is responsible for {footnote p. 236} his search for *Mengloth* ("Necklace-Glad"). This name has suggested that Mengloth is really Frigg, possessor of the famous Brisings' necklace, or else Freyja (cf. *Lokasenna*, 20: note).]

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Svipdag spake:
5. "Charms full good | then chant to me, mother,
And seek thy son to guard;
For death do I fear | on the way I shall fare,
And in years am I young, methinks."

Groa spake:
6. "Then first I will chant thee | the charm oft-tried,
That Rani taught to Rind;
From the shoulder whate'er | mislikes thee shake,
For helper thyself shalt thou have.

7. "Then next I will chant thee, | if needs thou must travel,
And wander a purposeless way:
The bolts of Urth | shall on every side
Be thy guards on the road thou goest.

8. "Then third I will chant thee, | if threatening streams
The danger of death shall bring:

[6. For this catalogue of charms (stanzas 6-14) cf. the *Ljothatal* (*Hovamol*, 147-165). *Rani and Rind*: the manuscripts, have these words in inverse relation; I have followed Neckel's emendation. Rind was the giantess who became the mother of Vali, Othin's son, the one-night-old avenger of Baldr (cf. *Voluspo*, 33-34, and *Baldrs Draumar*, 11 and note). Rani is presumably Othin, who, according to a skaldic poem, won Rind by magic.

7. Urth: one of the three Norns, or Fates; Cf. *Voluspo*, 20.]

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Yet to Hel shall turn | both Horn and Ruth,
And before thee the waters shall fail.

9. "Then fourth I will chant thee, | if come thy foes
On the gallows-way against thee:
Into thine hands | shall their hearts be given,
And peace shall the warriors wish.

10. "Then fifth I will chant thee, | if fetters perchance
Shall bind thy bending limbs:
O'er thy thighs do I chant | a loosening-charm,
And the lock is burst from the limbs,
And the fetters fall from the feet.

11. "Then sixth I will chant thee, | if storms on the sea
Have might unknown to man:
Yet never shall wind | or wave do harm,
And calm is the course of thy boat.

12. "Then seventh I chant thee, | if frost shall seek
To kill thee on lofty crags:
The fatal cold | shall not grip thy flesh,
And whole thy body shall be.

[8. *Horn and Ruth*: these two rivers, here used merely to symbolize all dangerous streams, are not included in the catalogue of rivers given in *Grimnismol*, 27-29, for which reason some editors have changed the names to Hron and Hrith.

10. This stanza is a close parallel to *Hovamol*, 150, and the fifth line may well be an interpolation from line 4 of that stanza.]

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13. "Then eighth will I chant thee, | if ever by night
Thou shalt wander on murky ways:

Yet never the curse | of a Christian woman
From the dead shall do thee harm.

14. "Then ninth will I chant thee, | if needs thou must strive
With a warlike giant in words:
Thy heart good store | of wit shall have,
And thy mouth of words full wise.

15. "Now fare on the way | where danger waits,
Let evils not lessen thy love!
I have stood at the door | of the earth-fixed stones,
The while I chanted thee charms.

16. "Bear hence, my son, | what thy mother hath said,
And let it live in thy breast;
Thine ever shall be the | best of fortune,
So long as my words shall last."

[13. *A dead Christian woman*: this passage has distressed many editors, who have sought to emend the text so as to make it mean simply "a dead witch." The fact seems to be, however, that this particular charm was composed at a time when Christians were regarded by all conservative pagans as emissaries of darkness. A dead woman's curse would naturally be more potent, whether she was Christian or otherwise, than a living one's. Presumably this charm is much older than the poem in which it here stands.

16. At this point Groa's song ends, and Svipdag, thus fortified, goes to seek Mengloth. All the link that is needed between the poems is approximately this: "Then Svipdag searched long for {footnote p. 239} Mengloth, and at last he came to a great house set all about with flames. And before the house there was a giant."]

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II. FJOLMINNSMOL

THE LAY OF FJOLSVITH

17. Before the house | he beheld one coming
To the home of the giants high.

Svipdag spake:
"What giant is here, | in front of the house,
And around him fires are flaming?"

Fjolsvith spake:
3. "What seekest thou here? | for what is thy search?
What, friendless one, fain wouldst thou know?
By the ways so wet | must thou wander hence,
For, weakling, no home hast thou here."

Svipdag spake:
19. "What giant is here, | in front of the house,
To the wayfarer welcome denying?"

[17. Most editors have here begun a new series of stanza numbers, but if the *Grougaldr* and the *Fjolsvinnsmol* are to be considered. as a single poem, it seems more reasonable to continue the stanza numbers consecutively. Bugge thinks a stanza has been lost before 17, including Fjolsvith's name, so that the "he" in line 1 might have something to refer to. However, just such a prose link as I have suggested in the note on stanza 16 would serve the purpose. Editors have suggested various rearrange merits in the lines of stanzas 17-19. The substance, however, is clear enough. The giant *Fjolsvith* ("Much-Wise"), the warder of the house in which Mengloth dwells, sees Svipdag coming and stops him with the customary threats. The assignment of the {footnote p. 240} speeches in stanzas 17-20, in the absence of any indications in the manuscripts, is more or less guesswork.]

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Fjolsvith spake:
"Greeting full fair | thou never shalt find,
So hence shalt thou get thee home.

20. "Fjolsvith am I, | and wise am I found,
But miserly am I with meat;
Thou never shalt enter | within the house,--
Go forth like a wolf on thy way!"

Svipdag spake:
21. "Few from the joy | of their eyes will go forth,
When the sight of their loves they seek;
Full bright are the gates | of the golden hall,
And a home shall I here enjoy."

Fjolsvith spake:
22. "Tell me now, fellow, | what father thou hast,
And the kindred of whom thou camst."

Svipdag spake:
"Vindkald am I, | and Varkald's son,
And Fjolkald his father was.

23. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:

[22. *Vindkald* ("Wind-Cold"), *Varkald* ("Cold of Early Spring') and *Fjolkald* ("Much Cold"): Svipdag apparently seeks to persuade Fjolsvith that he belongs to the frost giants.]

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Who is it that holds | and has for his own
The rule of the hall so rich?"

Fjolsvith spake:
224. "Mengloth is she, | her mother bore her
To the son of Svafrthorin;
She is it that holds | and has for her own
The rule of the hall so rich."

Svipdag spake:
25. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the gate? | for among the gods
Ne'er saw man so grim a sight."

Fjolsvith spake:
26. "Thrymgjol they call it; | 'twas made by the three,
The sons of Solblindi;
And fast as a fetter | the farer it holds,
Whoever shall lift the latch."

Svipdag spake:
27. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:

[24. Svafrthorin: who he was, or what his name means, or who his son was, are all unknown.

26. *Thrymgjol* ("Loud-Clanging"): this gate, like the gate of the dead, shuts so fast as to trap those who attempt to use it (cf. *Sigurtharkvitha en skamma*, 68 and note). it was made by the dwarfs, sons of *Solblindi* ("Sun-Blinded"), the traditional crafts men, who could not endure the light of day.]

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What call they the house? | for no man beheld
'Mongst the gods so grim a sight."

Fjolsvith spake:
28. "Gastropnir is it, | of old I made it
From the limbs of Leirbrimir;
I braced it so strongly | that fast it shall stand
So long as the world shall last."

Svipdag spake:
29. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the tree | that casts abroad
Its limbs o'er every land?"

Fjolsvith spake:
30. "Mimameith its name, | and no man knows
What root beneath it runs;
And few can guess | what shall fell the tree,
For fire nor iron shall fell it."

Svipdag spake:
31. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:

[28. *Gastropnir*: "quest-Crusher." *Leirbrimir's* ("Clay-Giant's") limbs: a poetic circumlocution for "clay"; cf. the description of the making of earth from the body of the giant Ymir, *Vafthruthnismol*, 21.

30. *Mimameith* ("Mimir's Tree"): the ash Yggdrasil, that overshadows the whole world. The well of Mimir was situated at its base; Cf. *Voluspo*, 27-29.]

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What grows from the seed | of the tree so great,
That fire nor iron shall fell?"

Fjolsvith spake:
32. "Women, sick | with child, shall seek
Its fruit to the flames to bear;
Then out shall come | what within was hid,
And so is it mighty with men."

Svipdag spake:
33. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What cock is he | on the highest bough,
That glitters all with gold?"

Fjolsvith spake:
34. "Vithofnir his name, | and now he shines
Like lightning on Mimameith's limbs;
And great is the trouble | with which he grieves
Both Surt and Sinmora."

[32. Gering suggests that two stanzas have been lost between stanzas 15 and 16, but the giant's answer fits the question quite well enough. The fruit of Yggdrasil, when cooked, is here assumed to have the power of assuring safe childbirth.

34. *Vithofnir* ("Tree-Snake"): apparently identical with either the cock Gollinkambi (cf. *Voluspo*, 43) or Fjalar (cf. *Voluspo*, 42), the former of which wakes the gods to battle, and the latter the giants. *Surt*: the giant mentioned in *Voluspo*, 52, as ruler of the fire-world; here used to represent the giants in general, who are constantly in terror of the cock's eternal watchfulness. *Sinmora*: presumably Surt's wife, the giantess who possesses the weapon by which alone the cock Vithofnir may be slain.]

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Svipdag spake:
35. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the hounds, | that before the house
So fierce and angry are?"

Fjolsvith spake:
36. "Gif call they one, | and Geri the other,
If now the truth thou wouldst know;
Great they are, | and their might will grow,
Till the gods to death are doomed."

Svipdag spake:
37. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
May no man hope | the house to enter,
While the hungry hounds are sleeping?"

Fjolsvith spake:
38. "Together they sleep not, | for so was it fixed
When the guard to them was given;
One sleeps by night, | the next by day,
So no man may enter ever."

Svipdag spake:
39, "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:

[35. The last two lines have been variously emended.

36. *Gif* and *Geri*: both names signify "Greedy." The first part of line 3 is conjectural; the manuscripts indicate the word "eleven," which clearly fails to make sense.]

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Is there no meat | that men may give them,
And leap within while they eat?"

Fjolsvith spake:
40. "Two wing-joints there be | in Vithofnir's body,
If now the truth thou wouldst know;
That alone is the meat | that men may give them,
And leap within while they eat."

Svipdag spake:
41. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What weapon can send | Vithofnir to seek
The house of Hel below?"

Fjolsvith spake:
42. "Lævatein is there, | that Lopt with runes
Once made by the doors of death;
In Lægjarn's chest | by Sinmora lies it,
And nine locks fasten it firm."

Svipdag spake:
43. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
May a man come thence, | who thither goes,
And tries the sword to take?"

[42. *Lævetein* ("Wounding Wand"): the manuscripts differ as to the form of this name. The suggestion that the reference is to the mistletoe with which Baldr was killed seems hardly reason able. *Lopt*: Loki. *Lægjarn* ("Lover of Ill"): Loki; cf. *Voluspo*, 35, {footnote p. 246} where the term appears as an adjective applied to Loki. This is Falk's emendation for the manuscripts' "Sægjarn," meaning "Sea Lover." *Sinmora*: cf. stanza 34.]

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Fjolsvith spake:
44. "Thence may he come | who thither goes,
And tries the sword to take,
If with him he carries | what few can win,
To give to the goddess of gold."

Svipdag spake:
45. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What treasure is there | that men may take
To rejoice the giantess pale?"

Fjolsvith spake:
46. "The sickle bright | in thy wallet bear,
Mid Vithofnir's feathers found;
To Sinmora give it, | and then shall she grant
That the weapon by thee be won."

Svipdag spake:
47. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:

What call they the hall, | encompassed here
With flickering magic flames?"

[44. *Goddess of gold*: poetic circumlocution for "woman," here meaning Sinmora.

46. *Sickle*: i.e., tail feather. With this the circle of impossibilities is completed. To get past the dogs, they must be fed with the wing-joints of the cock Vithofnir; the cock can be killed only {footnote p. 247} with the sword in Sinmora's possession, and Sinmora will give up the sword only in return for the tail feather of the cock.]

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Fjolsvith spake:
48. "Lyr is it called, | and long it shall
On the tip of a spear-point tremble;
Of the noble house | mankind has heard,
But more has it never known."

Svipdag spake:
49. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What one of the gods | has made so great
The hall I behold within?"

Fjolsvith spake:
50. "Uni and Iri, | Bari and Jari,
Var and Vegdrasil,
Dori and Ori, | Delling, and there
Was Loki, the fear of the folk."

[48. *Lyr* ("Heat-Holding"): just what the spear-point reference means is not altogether clear. Presumably it refers to the way in which the glowing brightness of the lofty hall makes it seem to quiver and turn in the air, but the tradition, never baffled by physical laws, may have actually balanced the whole building on a single point to add to the difficulties of entrance.

50. *Loki*, the one god named, was the builder of the hall, with the aid of the nine dwarfs. Jari, Dori, and Ori appear in the Voluspo catalogue of the dwarfs (stanzas 13 and 15); *Delling* appears in *Hovamol*, 161, and *Vafthruthnismol*, 25, in the latter case, however, the name quite possibly referring to some one else. The other dwarfs' names do not appear elsewhere. The manuscripts differ as to the forms of many of these names.]

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Svipdag spake:
51. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What call they the mountain | on which the maid
Is lying so lovely to see?"

Fjolsvith spake:
52. "Lyfjaberg is it, | and long shall it be
A joy to the sick and the sore;
For well shall grow | each woman who climbs it,
Though sick full long she has lain."

Svipdag spake:
53. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
What maidens are they | that at Mengloth's knees
Are sitting so gladly together?"

Fjolsvith spake:
54. "Hlif is one named, | Hlifthrasa another,
Thjothvara call they the third;

[52. *Lyfjaberg* ("Hill of Healing"): the manuscripts vary as to this name; I have followed Bugge's suggestion. This stanza implies that Mengloth is a goddess of healing, and hence, per haps, an hypostasis of Frigg, as already intimated by her name (cf. stanza 3, note). In stanza 54 Eir appears as one of Mengloth's handmaidens, and Eir, according to Snorri (*Gylfaginning*, 35) is herself the Norse Hygeia. Compare this stanza with stanza 32.

54. The manuscripts and editions show many variations in these names. They may be approximately rendered thus: Helper, Help-Breather, Folk-Guardian, Shining, White, Blithe, Peaceful, Kindly (?), and Gold-Giver.]

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Bjort and Bleik, | Blith and Frith,
Eir and Aurbotha."

Svipdag spake:
55. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
Aid bring they to all | who offerings give,
If need be found therefor?"

Fjolsvith spake:
56. "Soon aid they all | who offerings give
On the holy altars high;
And if danger they see | for the sons of men,
Then each from ill do they guard."

Svipdag spake:
57. "Now answer me, Fjolsvith, | the question I ask,
For now the truth would I know:
Lives there the man | who in Mengloth's arms
So fair may seek to sleep?"

Fjolsvith spake:
58. "No man there is | who in Mengloth's arms
So fair may seek to sleep,
Save Svipdag alone, | for the sun-bright maid
Is destined his bride to be."

[55. One of the manuscripts omits stanzas 55 and 56.

56. The first line is based on a conjectural emendation.]

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Svipdag spake:
59. "Fling back the gates! | make the gateway wide!
Here mayst thou Svipdag see!
Hence get thee to find | if gladness soon
Mengloth to me will give."

Fjolsvith spake:
60. "Hearken, Mengloth, | a man is come;
Go thou the guest to see!
The hounds are fawning, | the house bursts open,--
Svipdag, methinks, is there."

Mengloth spake:
61. "On the gallows high | shall hungry ravens
Soon thine eyes pluck out,
If thou liest in saying | that here at last
The hero is come to my hall.

62. "Whence camest thou hither? | how camest thou here?
What name do thy kinsmen call thee?
Thy race and thy name | as a sign must I know,
That thy bride I am destined to be."

Svipdag spake:
63. "Svipdag am I, | and Solbjart's son;
Thence came I by wind-cold ways;

[63. Solbjart ("Sun-B right"): not elsewhere mentioned. *The words of Urth*: i.e., the decrees of fate; cf. stanza 7.]

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With the words of Urth | shall no man war,
Though unearned her gifts be given."

Mengloth spake:
64. "Welcome thou art, | for long have I waited;
The welcoming kiss shalt thou win!
For two who love | is the longed-for meeting
The greatest gladness of all.

65. "Long have I sat | on Lyfjaberg here,
Awaiting thee day by day;
And now I have | what I ever hoped,
For here thou art come to my hall.

66. "Alike we yearned; | I longed for thee,
And thou for my love hast longed;
But now henceforth | together we know
Our lives to the end we shall live."

[65. Lyfjaberg cf. stanza 52 and note.]

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